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23 November 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: Major General Jack E. Thomas
Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, USAF

SUBJECT : The Insurgency Situation in Thailand

1. In response to your request, we have compiled the following notes on the insurgency situation in Thailand which we hope will assist you in preparing your briefing for General McConnell. These remarks reflect the agreed opinion of all of us in the Agency who deal with Thai matters but, because of what I understood to be the informal nature of your request, they have not been coordinated or even circulated outside of this building.

2. The Northeast: The Communist insurgents in northeast Thailand are increasing their numbers but maintaining a relatively low level of activity. The Communists currently seem less aggressive than they were last June when (as you are aware) there were three significant ambushes of Thai government forces. The tempo of armed encounters has quickened somewhat since the first of November, but this appears to have been the result of the resumption of more active patrolling by government forces with the end of the rainy season rather than a reflection of heightened subversive military initiative. A 12 November clash in the Na Kae district of Nakhon Phanom did result in the most severe casualties yet sustained by government forces in any single encounter (2 killed and 12 wounded) but it probably did not represent a terrorist decision to display greater aggressiveness. The government team attacked on 12 November was deep in an area heavily infested by subversives. The terrorists were probably reacting to this intrusion rather than deliberately seeking engagement with government troops.

3. Subversive activity in the northeast continues to be concentrated on the holding of forced village propaganda meetings. The Communists obviously regard these sessions as an effective method of disrupting local administration and impressing the populace with their prowess without exposing

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themselves to a possible mauling by government security forces. These meetings do seem to be an effective vehicle through which the Communists can demonstrate to the populace their control over a given area. The meetings appear to be conducted with increasing forcefulness. On several recent occasions village headmen have been manhandled or tied up in view of the villagers, police informants have been publicly executed, and villagers suspected by the Communists have been abducted at the end of the meetings.

4. Communist terrorism remains highly selective. Communist victims are invariably persons who have been openly cooperative with the Thai government. The lesson is not lost on the villagers that the way to avoid terrorist vengeance is to avoid cooperating with the government. This of course complicates the government's efforts to assert its control over the countryside. The Communists have been carrying out their armed propaganda activity with almost complete impunity. Only once (on 29 October 1966) has a village propaganda meeting been interrupted by Thai security forces. This interference did not cow the terrorists. Instead, in obvious retaliation, the police post responsible for this interruption has since been subjected to three armed attacks by Communist forces.

5. Counterinsurgency efforts have not yet stemmed the growth of the insurgency movement in the northeast; instead, subversive strength appears to be increasing. Last spring we estimated that there were about 650 hard core armed insurgents, we now believe the figure is in the 1,000-1,200 range. The latter figure, however, may reflect better knowledge on our part as much as, or possibly more than, an absolute increase in the size of the insurgent force. The figure of 5,000 insurgents has appeared in the press, but this seems to be a wild exaggeration based on a misunderstanding or misquotation of Thai sources.

6. Some increase in the number of Communist terrorists is indicated by the fact that since mid-summer they have been requisitioning food from the villagers. (Until mid-summer the Communists seemed to subsist largely on supplies obtained from their relatives or voluntary supporters.) There is no evidence that the Communists have increased their popularity significantly, however, since the villagers appear to acquiesce to Communist requisitions more out of fear rather than out of voluntary or ideological support for the Communist cause. This failure of the Communists to spark a wide popular following holds out considerable hope for the Thai government's counter-insurgency measures, particularly if government suppression operations can be increasingly supplemented by civic action efforts capable of enlisting support for the government.

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7. While current Thai government counterinsurgency programs tend to be weighted toward suppression activities, there is evidence of increased government awareness that remedial socio-political efforts must accompany police and suppressive action. With the assistance of various elements of the U.S. Mission, the government also appears to be giving increasing attention to the problems of strengthening village security. Static village defense teams (local people encadred by two or three policemen) are being set up in Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom. The Communists regard these village defense teams as a potential hindrance to their terrorist activity and as a result the teams are frequent targets of Communist harassment. The teams have already demonstrated their value in thwarting Communist incursions into the villages or in holding the terrorists at bay until government reinforcements can be called in. It is hoped that the villagers will regard these teams as concrete evidence that the Thai government is concerned with their safety, feels a responsibility for protecting them, and is not solely interested in suppression operations which, in some cases, alienate these villagers.

8. There is some evidence that North Vietnam has been involved in the training of Thai insurgents since at least 1962. Indeed, North Vietnam may be playing a more significant role in aiding the Thai Communists than Communist China, which has also trained some Thai insurgents. One recently captured terrorist stated that he and about 60 other Thai recruits received a six-month guerrilla course near Hanoi in 1962. His story generally parallels that of an insurgent defector who was a member of a class of 130 Thais who received an eight-month political and military training course in the Hoa Binh district of North Vietnam in 1965-1966. There have been occasional rumors of actual North Vietnamese troops in northeast Thailand, but their presence has never been verified and we consider it unlikely that North Vietnam would commit regular troops to Thailand at the present time.

9. The Mid-south and South: The situation in south and mid-south Thailand appears quiescent for the moment. No incidents were reported in the mid-south in October 1966 and only one encounter between the Border Patrol Police and Communist terrorists along the Malaysian border. The fact that things are momentarily quiet, however, affords no grounds for complacency. Current Communist activity in the mid-south is probably directed at recruiting and regrouping in the wake of several Thai government sweep operations conducted there in recent months. Communist terrorists (remnants of the Malaya insurgents) still exert a significant measure of control along the Malaysian border. Although these terrorists (fugitives from the Malaysian government and predominantly ethnic Chinese) do not appear presently involved

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in the Thai insurgency picture, logic and prudence would lead us to assume that this trained and disciplined force must figure in any Communist plans for future activity in the south.

10. General McConnell's Visit: When he sees General Dawee, we would suggest that General McConnell might most profitably concentrate his conversation on the insurgency picture. Dawee is almost exclusively concerned with military and insurgency matters. He would probably have few thoughts and little of significance to say on other issues (e. g., the Constitution) and would almost certainly appreciate an opportunity to talk at length on the insurgency situation which he knows best. In the past week he has given highly optimistic accounts of the Thai government's counterinsurgency measures to domestic and foreign press reporters.* He would almost certainly appreciate a friendly audience to which he could explain or expand on his thinking. Like other Thai officials, Dawee would probably bristle at any suggestion that the Thai government is giving too much emphasis to suppression operations and not enough attention to civic action. A relaxed discussion of such relative priorities with an old friend, however, could yield interesting and possibly helpful results.

11. We believe the situation estimate outlined above would generally be endorsed by the U. S. Mission in Bangkok, on whose recent comments and reporting we have drawn freely. We would suggest, however, that General McConnell could probably obtain the best current picture by consulting with [redacted] upon his arrival in Bangkok. If General McConnell so desires, [redacted] would be happy to talk with him before his departure from Washington.

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[redacted]
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

*Despite his optimism, General Dawee appears to be the source of the 5,000 insurgent figure (mentioned above), which is now appearing in the press. It seems, however, that Dawee was misquoted and actually used a figure of 1,000, which accords with our estimate.

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